

*can we speak in flowers.  
it will be easier for me to understand.*

*– other language*

Nayyirah Waheed, from *salt*.

## 1. What do you want to make?

For my graduation project this coming year I will create a body of work informed by my research and incorporate methodologies developed from the previous year. This work will be photographs, prints, and handmade papers, with an accompanying publication in the form of a zine or reader.

First, I will continue the work I began last trimester of first year. My self-directed research focused on the relationship between science and colonialism. I had been researching the ‘invasive alien’ plant species occupying Northern Europe. These plants will be utilised as both materials and as subjects. In parallel with my thesis paper I will explore and visualise themes introduced: ‘the other,’ entanglement, and phenomenology. What are the effects of colonisation and how did it manifest on imperial land? I will offer possibilities to answer some of the questions I bring forward in my thesis.

Furthermore, I will continue expanding on my research methodologies and further develop material experimentations. I will utilise my past research on non-toxic organic photochemistry and lensless camera techniques, and further develop forms of representation of landscape, paradise and utopias.

The photographs will be of plants with an added ‘intervention’ such as drawing, painting, or cut outs. See Figure 1, 2.1, 2.2 and 3 on the following pages for examples. Plant materials will be used as raw material for weavings, papers and ink to use as pigments and stains for printmaking. My interest in exploring all these different forms is part of my process of experimenting. I work intuitively and prefer to work on aspects of each piece as the rest progress simultaneously. I am open to the possible outcomes this project could take rather than focusing on only one form or direction.

The plants will be an invasive alien plant, a ‘non-native’ naturalised plant, and a ‘native’ plant – Japanese Knotweed, Tulips, and the Third Kind (I have not determined the ‘native’ plant yet). Additionally, I will combine these three plants with the methods I mentioned above to create images and further develop forms of representation of landscape.



Figure 1. *First painting method test, 2020.*

## 2. How do you plan to make it?

As mentioned, the research I will conduct for my thesis correlates with this body of work. The process of writing and image-making will intertwine and inform one another.

For the fall I will photograph and collect materials before all the plants die and decompose for the winter. I will work primarily with 'living' plants therefore this is time sensitive. However non-living plant parts such as fallen leaves will be collected. In the recent weeks I have decided to mainly focus on a selection of plants mainly Japanese Knotweed. As mentioned, the 'native' plant has not been selected however I will decide before the end of November.





Figure 2.1 and 2.2. *Painting method test comparison*, 2020.



Figure 3. *Fluorescent orange acrylic on hogweed*, 2020.



For the image-making aspect of my research I have been experimenting with incorporating drawing and painting over photographs. See Figure 4 below. I used wax oil pastels and acrylic paint. This method of redaction or 'blacking out' the background or subject of the image is to create a connection with how erasure and censorship played and continues to play a role within colonial histories. Redacting is used to remove information and details in declassified official government documents. The combination of drawing or painting on the images was to draw attention to the plant however it singled it out and created an alienation element that I found slightly violent (see Figure 2). I have since moved away from this process for the time being but might come back to it later on and approach it differently.



Figure 4. *Redacted hogweed*, 2020.



In the spring I will have a trip to Noord Holland to photograph the tulip blooming season and visit Aalsmeer Flower Auction. Additional details about my activities are listed in the Timetable. New for me this year is ink making however I have some experience with making dyes with organic materials. I will be developing my own recipes and will document the process.

### **3. Why do you want to make it?**

In 2018 I attended a residency on Coast Salish territories of the Lekwungen, Snaw-Naw-As (Nanoose), Scia-new (Cheanuh), T'Sou-ke, Malahat, W̱SÁNEĆ, S əwaθn Məsteyəx<sup>w</sup> (Tsawwassen), and the Hul'qumi'num Mustimuhw (Hul'qumi'num speaking people) including Stz'uminus (Chemainus), Cowichan, Halalt, Lake Cowichan, Lyackson, and Penelakut nations, and known by settlers as Mayne Island, BC, Canada. Indigenous peoples have been fishing by the Island as long ago as 3000 BC. It was a gathering place and resting place for many territories as it was a mid-way point between Vancouver Island, the home of the Kwakwaka'wakw (also known as the Kwakiutl), Nuu-chah-nulth, and Coast Salish peoples and the mainland. The island colonial history dates back to the 18th century. John Aitken, a two-spirited elder raised on the island was invited to share some of these stories. He spoke about the importance of land acknowledgements and its significant to Indigenous peoples to work towards decolonising the land.

My interest in place comes from my personal diasporic history: I am an immigrant and settler to Canada. I was born in a refugee camp in Hong Kong to Vietnamese parents that fled the communist country by boat. This past year was my first time living in Europe and I was anxious about living here and confronting the weight of colonial history. In physics, the principle of locality states that objects are directly “influenced by their immediate environment” or surroundings (Plotnitsky, 2016). I have a longing to empathise and create a connection with places I encounter.

I have since started taking this into account and acknowledging the land and its history with intention. I asked myself how I can work towards decolonizing as an uninvited guest and settler? How does one document a place without taking a photograph?

### **4. Who can help you and how?**

Dr. CJ van Dijk from WUR.nl – Biologist specialising in invasive alien plant species  
Tind van Andel – Professor at Leiden University specialising in invasive species  
Marit van der Kolk-Kuiper – Fabric station tutor for paper-making  
Jasper de Koster – Publication station tutor for digital photo prints, flatbed printing  
Kim Hospers – Publication station tutor for bookbinding  
Menno Boer – Image and sound tutor for analogue darkroom printing  
Natasha – Graduate research seminar tutor for writing  
Simon, David, Ine, Barend, and Rossella – Tutors for feedback  
Tom Chung – Feedback support and building expert



## 5. What is your timetable?

### October & November

- Write Project Proposal and Thesis Outline
- Take photos, collect and preserve Japanese knotweed (with whole leaves and flower buds) for paper-making, ink making and possibly weaving
- End of November: decide on 'native' plant; play and test with plant materials

### December

- Collect and preserve dry Japanese knotweed stems (after the leaves have fallen off) for paper-making and ink making
- [Winter Holidays in Vancouver, Canada]

### January

- [Half of January in Vancouver, Canada]
- Lots of reading, researching and writing
- Collage with public domain botanical drawings
- Printmaking with silkscreen and plant inks

### February

- Edit images taken from autumn
- Print digital prints at the Printing Station
- Darkroom develop and testing
- Further painting/drawing on images

### March

- Tulips bulbs begin to bloom and Japanese knotweed begins to spout and grow
- Flower market auctions for tulips open
- Further image-making with alternative processes and material experimentations
- Test plant dyes and inks on photo paper

### April

- Plants are back and tulips in bloom!!
- Trip to Noord Holland to photograph market and tulip fields
- Document project process to add to thesis paper

### May & June

- Create artist book and sculptures
- Plan and build installation
- Prepare photos for display with framing etc.

### July – **Exhibition & Graduation**

- Documentation of exhibition



## 6. Relation to previous practice

As mentioned in my Thesis Outline, recurring themes in my work relate to the land and the representation of nature, place and displacement. Two of the thematic projects from last year, the photobook and EYE film fall in these categories. My projects are research-based and embraces experimentation. This project shares my past interest in lensless photography and filmmaking, and the use of non-traditional materials such as organic matter in the image making process.

The reader book format of collected extracts and texts was first introduced to me last year through Steve Rushton's Reading, Writing & Research Methodologies course. It was an intriguing form of collaboration that I want to try again this year. I want to formulate a reader with the influential texts and theories that are the driving force behind my research.

## 7. Relation to a larger context

My practice is motivated by phenomenology theory and draws inspiration from the Land Art movement with artists such as Maya Lin, Nancy Holt, and Robert Smithson. Including ideologies from ecofeminist philosophy such as Donna Haraway and artist Ana Mendieta in regard to ecology, environmentalism, and stewardship. My project approaches the entanglement of history and politics using plants as metaphor akin to Taryn Simon's *Paperwork and the Will of Capitalism* and Kapwani Kiwanga's *The Marias*.

Moreover, my project shares similar interest with other artists working in experimental photography often using analogue techniques such as Rinko Kawauchi, Walead Beshty, Elad Lassry, Eileen Quinlan, Annette Kelm, and Yosuke Takeda. Their focus is less on documentation but more on interpretations or perspectives of their surroundings and the world.



Figure 5. *Paperwork and the Will of Capital*, Taryn Simon, Gagosian Gallery, 2015.



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Figure 5. *Paperwork and the Will of Capital*, Taryn Simon, Gagosian Gallery, photo by Rob McKeever, 2015.

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